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Joshua Johnson Revisited: Filling the Lacunae

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JOSHUA JOHNSON REVISITED: FILLING THE LACUNAE

A Thesis

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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Toby Maria Chieffo

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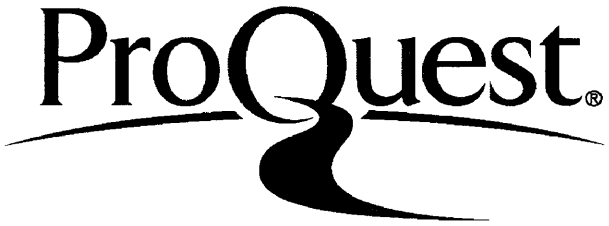

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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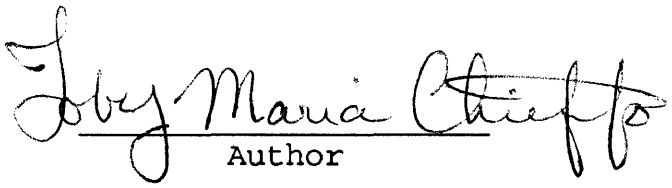

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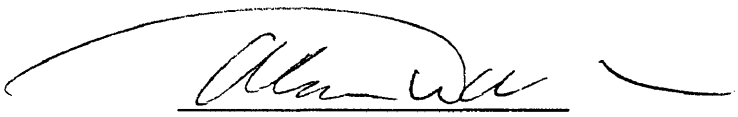
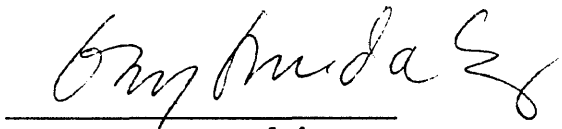


Alan Wallach



E. Grey Gundaker

John Brown

DEDICATION

For my parents

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ABSTRACT

This study examines and attempts to fill the gaps surrounding the life of Joshua Johnson (active 1795-1825), freeman and Maryland portrait painter. Since his designation as the first identifiable black portraitist in the colonies, Johnson has been the source of intense interest and speculation.

An examination of the portrait of the Reverend John Carroll(1735-1825) will provide insight into Johnson's origins, religion, and artistic influences. The persuasive theories of previous scholars are explored and challenged, while underdeveloped theories regarding Johnson's history are searched and expanded.

The results of this study in conjunction with the frequently misattributed portrait of Bishop Carroll will reveal Joshua Johnson's link to a previously unreported French portrait painter and priest who was known to aid free blacks and slaves.

JOSHUA JOHNSON REVISITED: FILLING THE LACUNAE

INTRODUCTION

The story of Joshua Johnson, freeman and portrait painter active in Baltimore 1795-1825, leaves many lacunae to be filled. One of the most intriguing gaps is the authorship and circumstances surrounding the portrait of the Reverend John Carroll (1735-1825). Through a detailed case study of the portrait, I will provide information relating to its authorship, sitter, time, place, source of commission, and insights into the origins, religion, and painting influences of this early black portrait artist.[1]

There is very little extant evidence available to reach accurate conclusions about Johnson's life.[2] Scholars, most notably J. Hall Pleasants, Linda Crocker Simmons, Mary Lynn Perry, Carolyn J. Weekley, Stiles Tuttle Colwill, and Linda Roscoe Hartigan have developed many persuasive theories concerning Johnson and his work

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[1]Because Johnson's exact ethnic heritage is unknown he is referred to in this as a mulatto and free mulatto as well as a free black. This allows me to cover all possible aspects of Johnson's experience as a person of color.

[2]Physical evidence includes two newspaper advertisements in 1798 and 1802, an 1817 listing in the Baltimore City Directory as portrait painter and "Free Householder of Color," Baltimore City Directory listings at nine different addresses between 1796 and 1824 as limner or portrait painter, the Catholic baptismal records of his children, and over eighty attributed portraits (one with his name in print not script and the name "J. Johnson" listed as the artist in the will of one painting's sitter).

which will be explored in this thesis. There also remain some unexplored and underdeveloped theories regarding Johnson's history. Among these are his possible origins in Saint Dominique as a free mulatto or free black and his probable arrival in America during or just before the Saint Dominique Slave Revolts in 1791.[3] Additional hypotheses of mine include his life as a French Catholic, free person of color practicing the art of painting in Baltimore as well as the French painting influences on his style, technique and perhaps early training. Most important is the linkage of Johnson to French painter, Joseph-Pierre Picot de Limoëlan Clorivière (1768-1826). Clorivière was active in Baltimore (1806-12) at the time the Carroll portrait was painted, and was known to aid free blacks and slaves. Furthermore, as a colleague of John Carroll, Clorivière had the opportunity to provide Johnson, a fellow French Catholic portrait painter, with an introduction to Bishop Carroll.

[3]John Johnson, Joshua's first son was born (in Saint Dominique?) on November 24, 1786 and baptized in Baltimore on June 2, 1793. St. Dominique was the name given to one third of the Spanish island of Santo Domingo when Spain ceded that third to France in 1697. In 1804 after independence was won from France the Arawak name Haiti was adopted.

CHAPTER I.

JOSHUA JOHNSON'S ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

Questions about Johnson's origins remain. Some believe he was a slave, French valet or servant of the Peale family of artists. "These clues are supported by the oral tradition in two families--one that he was a valet of a Peale and another that his master was a well known artist."[4] There is also mention of a "Negro boy who 'spoke French.'" This French speaking servant was said to belong to Robert Polk, father of Charles Peale Polk (1767-1822). Scholars have assumed that this servant was willed by Polk to Charles Peale Polk, even though the 1780 Peale papers make no mention of this. When the 1784 "Treaty of Peace" arch, designed by Charles Willson Peale (1741-1827) was erected, Charles Peale Polk and a "French servant" were present. However, the Peales, particularly Charles Willson, were meticulous note takers, and almost all of their servants were mentioned by name. If Johnson was indeed in the Peale household and trained as an artist or showed some talent for painting, it is most likely that the Peales would have recorded this fact. Someone with

[4]Weekley, Carolyn J., "Who Was Joshua Johnson?" in her *Joshua Johnson: Freeman and Early American Portrait Painter*. (Williamsburg: Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center, 1987), p.51.

Johnson's talent in the Peale household would not have gone unnoted. The possible evidence that Johnson was French speaking is indicated on his painting of *Basil Brown* in which the date October is signed by Johnson as, "'Oct bre.'"[5]

Scholars have traditionally linked Joshua Johnson stylistically with the Peale family, whose work is founded on Charles Willson's earlier study of the English tradition in painting. However, based on circumstantial evidence, this stylistic connection of Johnson to the Peales is not supported by similarity of technique or aspects of iconography. The association is grounded upon the preeminence of the Peale family as portraitists and the purported lack of alternative artistic influences. Among the gaps in this theory is the fact that the Peales were not known to help or recommend commissions to artists other than kin, and one finds no mention of Joshua Johnson in the Peale Papers.

Johnson's first public advertisement reads as follows,

> Portrait Painting
>
> The subscriber, grateful for the liberal encouragement which an indulgent public have conferred on him, in his first essays, in PORTRAIT PAINTING, returns his sincere acknowledgement.

[5] Ibid., 52.

> He takes liberty to observe, that by the dint of industrious application, he has so far improved and matured his talents, that he can insure the most precise and natural likenesses.
>
> As a self-taught genius, deriving from nature and industry his knowledge of the Art; and having experienced many obstacles in the pursuit of his studies, it is highly gratifying to him to make assurances of his ability to execute all commands, with an effect, and in a style, which must give satisfaction. He therefore respectfully solicits encouragement. Apply at his House, in the alley leading from Charles to Hanover street, back of Sear's Tavern.
>
> -- Joshua Johnston[6]

Johnson clearly stated that he was "a self-taught genius, deriving from nature and industry his knowledge of the Art." He also stated that he has his own "effect and. . . style" and was capable of satisfying any client. Note here that he does not mention any connection to the well-known Peales or any other artist, as he surely would have in order to enhance his professional standing.

Technically, following English portraiture, the Peales painted on a substantial base of a lead-white ground, followed by a resinous oil paint,and finished with

[6] *Baltimore Intelligencer*, Dec. 19, 1798

glazes and a final varnish.[7] Johnson's canvas preparation diverges from the stiff lead-white paste ground used by the Peales. Instead, Johnson's canvases are prepared with a porous, fluid ground.[8] The subsequent thinly applied pigment penetrates into this absorbent ground and results in a flatter, less layered appearance of the sitter's features. Aesthetically, the Peales' three dimensional rendering of the sitter contrasts Johnson's understated use of shadows in the depiction of the sitter's face and hands. This sparse use of shadows or modeling creates an all-over flatness of the portrait. Additionally, there is no Peale precedent for Johnson's use of the full-length standing child as well as other lesser elements. In short, the assumption that "A comparison between Johnson's early paintings and contemporary works by Charles Willson Peale, Charles Peale Polk, Rembrandt Peale (1778-1860), and Raphaelle Peale (1774-1825) shows that Johnson assumed their stylistic tradition"[9] fails to be supported by visual and physical evidence.

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[7]Sellers, Charles Coleman. *Portraits and Miniatures by Charles Willson Peale*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1952. p.11

[8]This is demonstrated by the reference to drips on the selvage edge as reported in the conservation observations in Jones, Sien. "Johnson's Materials and His Techniques" in C. J. Weekley.*Joshua Johnson: Freeman and Early American Portrait Painter.* (Williamsburg: Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center, 1987), p. 66

[9]Miller, J. Jefferson, "Foreword," in C. J. Weekley. (Williamsburg: Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center, 1987), p. 13.

Every author writing about Johnson has assumed or speculated about a Peale-Johnson relationship, yet there is no concrete proof that a professional, artistic or servant/master relationship ever existed between any member of the Peale family and Joshua Johnson. There is no doubt that in a city the size of Baltimore, Johnson saw the work of the Peales as well as other artists. However, Johnson seems to have developed his own style, one with a decidedly French influence, the nature of which will be expanded upon in a subsequent chapter.

I remain unconvinced that Johnson's earlier works as Weekley contends,

> Show considerable Polk/Peale influence and they lack the strong stylization of the eyes and other facial features that is so prominent in Johnson's later portraits . . . understandably, Johnson would have produced pictures in the late 1790's that looked more like his masters' models —the works of Polk and the Peales and less like those he produced after years of practice.[10]

There is little logic in the concept that an artist who was capable of achieving a European trained Peale-look of a richly painted glazed surface would "after years of practice" develop a non-academic linear, stylized, thinly painted, flat, style.

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[10]Weekley, Carolyn J. "Who Was Joshua Johnson?" in her *Joshua Johnson: Freeman and Early American Portrait Painter*. (Williamsburg: Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center, 1987), p.53.

For example, a purported "early work" by Johnson, *Mrs. John Moale and her Granddaughter* (Fig.1), does not appear to be by Johnson's hand. Instead, it resembles the work of Charles Peale Polk and is considered to be painted by Johnson under the influence of Polk. Yet it contains none of the hallmarks of Johnson's style--the delicately rendered hair, the French Empire style of dress, simple lace bonnet with ribbon, thin application of paint, and the lack of heavy shadowing on the face. If it were not for Moale family oral history that claims Mrs. Moale and her granddaughter were painted by a family servant or slave, the painting would have probably been assigned to Polk.

Further attempts to bolster a relationship between Johnson and members of the Peale family proceed by stating that the poses Johnson selected for his sitters are remarkably similar to those used by Polk or Charles Willson Peale. For example Weekley continues,

> The open window vistas seen in Johnson's work or his larger interior/exterior settings with swagged curtains are a clear throwback to the work of Charles Willson Peale who executed such arrangements with greater skill. Polk also utilized such backgrounds from his uncle and utilized his own.[11]

Additionally, the utilization of devices such as a letter, a book or flowers and fruit held in the sitter's hand are

[11] Ibid., 51.

employed frequently by both Johnson and Polk. It is true that these props are common in both artists' work, but they are not unusual occurrences in portrait painting of the period, nor is the reference to the swagged curtains or vistas Johnson employs a "clear throwback to the work of Charles Willson Peale," an anomaly (or unique to Peale) in American or European portraiture (Fig. 2).[12]

Another problematic gap is found in Johnson's purported linkage to the Peales by shared sitters. Scholars have noted many of the patrons of Johnson were also patrons of the Peales. It has been suggested that the Peales recommended Johnson to their sitters. However, as previously mentioned, there is nothing in the Peale Papers or any other source indicating such recommendations. Why would the Peales share their patrons with Johnson and increase their competition? The notion of the Peales recommending sitters to Johnson is not sustained in the face of the more likely argument of proximity of the sitters to Johnson's living and studio quarters and the propensity of patrons to patronize more than one artist.

The focus of this thesis is the means and influences Johnson employed to gain access to one prominent sitter, specifically Reverend John Carroll. No scholar has thus far been able to account for Johnson's access to Carroll. Carolyn Weekley's entry for this portrait in *Joshua Johnson: Freeman and Early American Portrait Painter*

[12]Ibid., 51.

correctly assumes a connection between the commission and Johnson's church affiliation:

> Johnson's involvement with the Baltimore Roman Catholic Church is supported by the baptismal and death records of his children. Johnson's reason for painting Bishop Carroll is assumed to be the religious affiliation rather than a recommendation by Polk or Peale such as may have resulted in Johnson's much earlier work for prominent families.[13]

Portraits of John Carroll are rare. The fact that there are a limited number of images confirms the difficulty of gaining a sitting with him. Charles Willson Peale's son, Rembrandt, was denied a sitting with Carroll:

> On April 29, 1809 Charles Willson Peale wrote to Bishop Carroll: 'My son Rembrandt told me that you had consented to sit for him sometime back.' On the same day he wrote to Rembrandt in Baltimore: 'I am sorry Bishop Carroll declines sitting for his portrait, because I know you would have made a fine one.'[14]

Who was John Carroll, and why was he so unavailable to the artists who pursued him as a sitter? How did a free black come to paint this portrait of the first Archbishop of Baltimore, founder of Georgetown College and

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[13]Ibid., 148.

[14]As cited in Ann C.Van Devanter. *Anywhere So Long as There be Freedom*. Baltimore: The Baltimore Museum of Art, 1975. p.207.

the most prominent eighteenth century Catholic leader in America?

CHAPTER II.

JOHN CARROLL, THE SITTER AND HIS PORTRAIT

John Carroll was the first Catholic Bishop in America (1790-1808) and first Archbishop of Baltimore (1808-15). He was the brother of Daniel Carroll, signer of the United States Constitution, and cousin of Charles Carroll, signer of the Declaration of Independence. John began his education at Bohemia Manor, in northern Maryland. The manor, where he studied until 1748, was built and operated by Jesuit teachers. John continued his studies at the College of Saint-Omers, found his vocation and entered the novitiate in 1753 at Watten, seven miles from Saint-Omers.[15]

Ordained circa 1769, John returned to Maryland just before the American Revolution where he ministered to Catholics in southern Maryland. In 1776, John along with his cousin Charles, Samuel Chase (another signer of the Declaration of Independence), and Benjamin Franklin were sent on a fruitless mission by the Second Continental Congress to convince Canada to join the thirteen colonies in breaking away from Britain.

By 1784 John was named Superior of the United States

[15]Van Devanter, Ann C. *Anywhere So Long as There be Freedom*. Baltimore: The Baltimore Museum of Art, 1975. p. 86.

Mission by Rome. In the spirit of freedom from foreign interference in American affairs, John convinced the Vatican to allow for a free election of a bishop by the American clergy and to have it ratified, after the election, by the Vatican. In 1789, John Carroll was nominated and confirmed by Pope Pius VI as the first Bishop of the United States. John proved to be an able statesman among the various ethnic backgrounds (Irish, German and French) of the clergy practicing in the United States.

> Clergy and the Laity alike . . . coming as they did without the experiences in democratic procedures and lacking the heritage which the colonists had so valiantly preserved both during and after their War for Independence, the new comers felt suddenly loosed from their former bonds of poverty, political subservience, and religious proscription. It required patience and tact, and above all a limitless charity, to deal with the countless conflicts of Carroll's rapidly growing flock.[16]

Carroll, a friend and admirer of George Washington, remained a fierce supporter of religious freedom, liberty and equality for Catholic citizens who constituted a minority in the United States. One of the Archbishop's concerns was for meeting the educational and spiritual

[16] Ibid., 91.

needs of the Catholics. He encouraged the foundation of religious orders for women, and established the Saint Mary's Diocesan Seminary in Baltimore and Mount St. Mary College in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

Like other leaders of his time, Carroll was distressed over the issue of slavery.

> Arch Bishop [*sic*] Carroll once acknowledged frankly his uneasiness over the question of slavery. In a letter to one of his priests who criticized the institution of slavery in the United States, he wrote, 'I am as far from you as being in my mind at many things I see, and know, relating to the treatment and manners of the Negroes. I do the best I can to correct the evils I see; and then recur to those principles, which, I suppose, influenced the many eminent and holy missioners in S. America and Asia, where slavery equally exists.' In the end, he tried to meet the demands of his conscience, the pastoral needs of all his people, and the standards of American public opinion.[17]

Carroll was concerned with the welfare and education of blacks, and administered to their religious needs to the best of his ability. Given his interest in helping all members of his congregation, it is likely that Carroll would have entertained a sitting for a Catholic

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[17]Davis, Cyprian. *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1990. p.41.

mulatto such as Johnson.

Carroll provided spiritual guidance to all citizens by enlisting the support of the French emigré priests. French priests who refused to take an oath to support the new French constitution ordered by King Louis XVI were exiled or imprisoned.[18]

The French Revolution had repercussions in Saint Dominique where black slaves, inspired by European revolutionaries demanded freedom, launched a revolution against white and mulatto land owners. As a consequence with "many island people came a number of priests seeking for a place of safety in the United States . . . in all, almost a hundred French priests came to the United States to labor during the episcopate of John Carroll."[19] The Catholic colonies profited from the services of these priests who volunteered to minister under Bishop Carroll's direction. Baltimore was a particularly popular area for the emigration of French priests. "There seem to have been more priests laboring in Maryland, especially in Baltimore, than in most of the other cities and states of the diocese."[20] Many of the refugees arriving from Saint Dominique in Baltimore were blacks or mulattos as well as several priests who "spent many years in teaching catechism to the children of that race and caring for the

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[18]Ruskowski, Leo F. *French Emigré Priests in the U.S.* Washington, DC Catholic University of America Press, 1940. p.2.

[19]Ibid., 9.

[20]Ibid., 28.

welfare of the parents as well."[21] The Bishop was the focal point of Catholicism in Baltimore and the most important subject for a Catholic portrait painter.

Johnson's portrait of Bishop Carroll (Fig. 3) is a modest 31-by-25 inch canvas of medium to fine thread, including some occasional heavy threads woven into the fabric. The canvas is currently adhered to a Masonite secondary support, a conservation technique used in the 1950's and 1960's. The selvage or tacking edge was trimmed at the edge of the Masonite making it impossible to determine its original size or to establish the location of the original tack holes that would determine the depth of the strainer.[22] The lack of selvage on the Bishop's portrait prevents any comparison to Johnson's known use of thin strainers as observed by conservator Sian Jones.[23] The portrait's linen fabric and thread size compares favorably to Jones' observations of Johnson's existing unrestored paintings.

The half length portrait of Carroll depicts him standing, holding a book in his right hand over which his left hand crosses and holds the cleric's biretta. Carroll has an ample figure tapering upward towards

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[21]Ibid., 30.

[22]A non-expandable joint, creating the wood support to which the canvas is stretched and attached. As Jones indicates, Johnson employed the use of strainers as opposed to stretchers (a wood support with expandable corners) in her "Johnson's Materials and His Techniques" in C. J. Weekley. *Joshua Johnson: Freeman and Early American Portrait Painter.* (Williamsburg: Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center, 1987), p.66.

[23]Ibid., 65.

sloping shoulders and a smallish head. The pear shaped body is a typical characteristic of Johnson's style. These characteristics--the small sloping shoulders, tapering neck and oval face--are used to signify grace and elegance and are most frequently seen in Johnson's depiction of women.

The figure, smaller than life size, fills the canvas, leaving little negative space or background. The head begins approximately two to three inches from the top of the canvas with the bent elbows four-fifths from the top of the canvas. The fifth of the space is occupied by his arms, hands and the objects he holds. The painting ends just below the sitter's hips. I was struck by the relatively small physical dimensions of the canvas, which is closer to the dimensions of an average 30-by-25 inch bust size portrait. In the eighteenth century a half length portrait such as that of John Carroll would have been painted on a larger canvas. "The majority [of portraits in the colonial period] were two sizes: 30-by-25-inch, showing the sitter to the waist, but not normally including the hands, and the 50-by-40-inch, showing the sitter to the knees,"[24] the half length painting, portrait of *Daniel Park* by John Colsterman is more typical of the relationship of image to canvas size (Fig.4). The proportion of Johnson's canvas is uncommon in its over-all

[24]Saunders, Richard H., and Ellen G. Miles. *American Colonial Portraits 1700-1776.* Washington DC: Smithsonian Press, 1987. p.61.

small size and narrowness. Generally, a half length, even if it were on a smaller canvas would have a width closer to the height as shown in Cosmo Alexander's (1724-1772) portrait of *Henry Benedict Maria Clement Stuart (1725-1807),Prince-Cardinal Duke of York* at 30 1/2-by-29 1/2 inches (Fig. 5). This unusual placement of the figure in the pictorial space is also visible in Johnson's other works. His painting of *Mrs. Thomas Everette and her Five Children* (Fig. 6) also surprises the viewer, particularly after looking at a photograph of the painting and then seeing it in situ. The painting is composed of six small full length figures on a 38-by-55 inch canvas; one would expect the canvas to be proportionally higher in relation to the width in order to accommodate the image of the sitters. The result is a long narrow canvas with miniaturized figures.

The coloration of the John Carroll portrait begins with a gray ground or priming, the layer of pigment that fills in the weave of the canvas and creates a surface on which to paint. This use of gray priming compares favorably to Jones' assessment that Johnson favored gray to buff tones and used off-white ground colors.[25] The thinly applied priming and subsequent paint layer allows the canvas weave to remain visible. Additionally, because of the notably thin application of paint, the priming

[25]Jones, Sien. "Johnson's Materials and His Techniques" in C. J. Weekley. *Joshua Johnson: Freeman and Early American Portrait Painter.*(Williamsburg: Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center, 1987), p.66

color shows through. "This seems to have been a fairly deliberate choice as Johnson had a very strong sense of color. His choice of priming color adds subtlety and depth to the paint on top."[26] The background color is burnt umber which surrounds the figure with a lighter variation of this color to the left of the sitter's face and left shoulder. Carroll's cape with hooded collar is burnt sienna with mars red highlights on the folds. His alb under the cape is white with black trim on the cuff which terminates in a lace ruffle.[27] Around Carroll's neck are two items, a gold pectoral cross on a gold chain and a silk French style stole decorated with golden scrolls alternating with a radiant sun symbol.[28] The stole is held together with a silk cord and tassel.[29]

The figure's head and facial features have a linear quality, and the contours of the figure are sharply defined from the background. Typical of Johnson's work and evident in the portrait of Carroll is the indication of the eyelid line which is very narrow.

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[26]Ibid., 66

[27]Johnson may have had only a brief sitting with Carroll to sketch or paint, concentrating on the head, and leaving the figure to be completed in his studio; as a consequence Carroll's cloak is brown instead of the traditional gray and the biretta (the priest's square cap with three projections with a tassel on top) held in Carroll's hand is not accurate. In addition Carroll's eyes are brown rather than hazel as in a portrait by Gilbert Stuart (1755-1825).

[28]Probably made in France where John Carroll was a student or hand made for him in America.

[29]The tassel is a Johnson iconographic device that can be found in several of his paintings.

It gives the illusion of a flattened eye, as opposed to the epicanthic crease or fold higher in the lid to create the illusion that the eyeball is more three dimensional. Also contributing to the two-dimensional appearance is his use of highlights under the eyes instead of shadows. The nose is sharply drawn, showing a shadow which is darker than Johnson usually employs, a result of over painting during restoration.[30] The bridge of the nose reflects the general characteristics of the flesh tone, which consists of four colors: pinkish (flesh), light peach (highlighting), and an overall greenish tonality with darker brown shadows. The sallow or gray/green tone on the face is contrasted by two tone pinks which are used as highlights on the nose and face. The mouth is tightly drawn and the shadowed corners of the lips give the sitter an ambiguous *Mona Lisa*-like smile. Carroll's right ear (the only one visible) can be described as flat, small, and lower on the head than anatomically proper. The coloration is a combination of the gray/green tone and pink, with mars red shadowing on the inside. Where the hair meets the scalp there is a very visible light peach color which serves as a transition from the skin to the hair. The lack of shadowing increases the illusion of flatness (Fig. 7).

[30]This was evident under a black light investigation that I conducted. The left eyelid and the line under the chin are darkened by over painting. Additionally, the typical Johnson white highlights on the sides of the eye's iris may have been removed or overpainted during a conservation project.

In addition to Johnson's other identifiable portrait techniques is the rendering of the sitter's hands. The positioning and the drawing of the hands is significant in identifying Johnson as the artist of this portrait. In many cases Johnson's sitters are holding objects such as fruits, toys, flowers, baskets or books. Johnson's portrait of Carroll, shows the Bishop holding a book in his right hand and the biretta in his left. The arms, hands and props in this lower quarter of the canvas create a complex and crowded lower portion of the painting. To compensate for this complexity, Johnson reduces the right hand to a thumb and three fingers (one finger is not shown). Carroll's right forefinger is inserted between the pages, while the other two fingers are positioned below the back cover of the book. Moreover, the fingers are formed with an exaggerated taper that reduces them to a triangular shape (Fig. 8). These particular mannerisms regarding the three fingered hand with one finger placed in the pages of the book has been associated with Gilbert Stuart's portrait of John Carroll (Fig. 9).

In the bust-size Stuart version, Carroll is shown in a seated position with one hand visible. The hand evidently has only three fingers one of which is inserted in the pages of the book. This similarity of the hand with three fingers in both paintings accounts, in part, for the previous attribution of the standing Carroll portrait to Jeremiah Paul (1760-1820). Paul was sent by

Carroll to see the Stuart portrait in order to prepare sketches for an engraving. It was thought that whoever painted the standing Carroll portrait was aware of the Stuart portrait and because Paul was the only artist officially sent to view this portrait, the conclusion was that it was painted by Paul.

One of the frequently mentioned similarities between the Johnson and Stuart portraits is the depiction of a three fingered hand.[31] However it is clear that Johnson employed this mannerism in several other works, some predating the portrait of the Bishop (Fig. 10).[32]

Also, the typical Johnson rendering of the Bishop's left hand with its tapering boneless fingers and elongated prominent fifth finger offsets the attribution to Paul. The representation of the hands strengthens the case that it is Johnson's work.

Other minor characteristics that link the standing Carroll portrait to Johnson includes his careful attention to fabrics and lace. For example, the portrait of *Barbara Baker Murphy*, ca.1810 (Fig. 11) shows the sitter wearing a lace bonnet where the fine delineation of the detail of the design and bow are evident. This treatment can be found in the lace cuffs of the Bishop's

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[31]I discovered that this well documented Stuart "hand-mannerism" was not original to Stuart and can be credited to his teacher Cosmo Alexander. It seems that it was an expediency for Johnson to use this mannerism rather than an aesthetic decision as in the case of Stuart.

[32]Similar hand treatment can be found in Weekley, catalog numbers: 4,7,16,19,24,30,36,45,49,51,59,63, and 80.

garment. The detail in the *Murphy* painting continues on the bodice of the dress ending in a tasseled cord tied in a bow; a tasseled cord like the one seen in the portrait of John Carroll.

CHAPTER III.

THE FRENCH PROVINCIAL STYLE

Johnson's painting style can be described as French Provincial, that is, the painting style commonly practiced outside the larger cities of France and not associated with the art academies. His works have a two dimensional linear quality rather than a three dimensional appearance developed through the use of more heavily painted shadows. The sitters are rendered with thinly applied paint and minimally modeled features. The nose and mouth are carefully outlined with a thin or narrow shadowing and the body is usually stiff. Generally, the lips are small and tightly closed. The rendering of the hair, in fine individual strands, is another typical characteristic of French painting. J. Hall Pleasants was the first to note that Johnson's paintings have a "French primitive flavor."[33] He describes Johnson's paintings as having "a stiff manner . . . with few exceptions the face is shown about three-quarters full. The eyes are always directed forward . . . the mouths are all drawn rather tightly."[34]

Beginning with this lead from Pleasants, I linked

[33]Pleasants, J. Hall. "*The First* American Negro Portrait Painter," *The Maryland Historical Magazine* 37, no.2, p. 127 June 1942.

[34]Ibid., 127

Johnson to the French tradition because of the resemblance of his work to an 1844 engraving by John Sartain (1880-1897) after Clorivière's portrait miniature of John Carroll (currently unlocated) (Fig. 12).[35] Stylistic similarities exist between this French Provincial miniature painter's portrait of Carroll and Johnson's. The most obvious shared characteristic is treatment of the eye lids, which are rendered with minimal depth by the lack of shadows. The comparison is appropriate because in both images the sitter appears to be the same age.

Certain elements in the engraving need clarification. For example, the engraving printed in 1844 shows the completed facade of the Catholic Basilica in Baltimore which was not finished until several years after Clorivière's death in 1826 and John Carroll's in 1815. Additionally, Clorivière's miniature of Carroll most likely did not contain a curtain, pillar and an extensive landscape view behind the Bishop. These added enhancements to the print seem to be the engraver's addition. In another print by the same engraver, the Right Reverend Leonard Neale, D.D.(1746-1817)(Fig. 13) is shown with his head replacing that of Carroll's and the body, clothing, scenic view, etc. for the most part remaining the same.

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[35]PAINTED BY I. P. DE C./ ENGRAVED BY J. SARTAIN./ *The Most Rev. John Carroll/ First Archbishop of Baltimore.* The original is most certainly from a miniature, because Clorivière is not known to have painted in oils or to have advertised that he painted in oils.

No other miniatures by Clorivière are known to contain these stylistic elements. The portrait miniature was most likely taken from life during Clorivière's stay in Baltimore between 1806-1812. Additionally, the miniature probably was completed close to the time that Johnson painted Carroll's portrait.

Clorivière painted miniatures of other priests in the early months of 1808 while he was a student at Baltimore's St. Mary's Seminary. His miniature of Rev. Robert Molyneux, S.J., (1738-1808) (Fig. 14) is typical of his work of this period. It offers a fair representation of what the Carroll miniature probably looked liked in terms of the physical proportion and placement of the figure in space.

What is the difference between French Provincial painting or French folk art and what is characterized as American folk art? Unfortunately, this is not an easy question to answer. Very little documentation exists for French Provincial portrait painting or French folk art portraits. I do not wish to seem presumptuous when trying to codify the "Frenchness" of folk painting, but the topic deserves consideration.

Academic French portrait painting in the eighteenth century introduced distinguishing traits to the sitters' pose that suggested,

> Arrested motion or the possibility of motion . . . [and if the sitter was still]

> relaxation and ease. There was a focus on the face as the reflection of character and a drive to increase the sense of life and personality through a mastery of facial expression. And there was a tendency to include accessory details that illuminated the character of the sitter and private or domestic activities that added to the intimacy of the portrait. [36]

"French art of the golden age, both from paintings and prints, is derived luxury, grandeur of scale, and clarity of feature."[37]

The French Provincial painters who lacked formal training tended to borrow certain characteristics from the French academic tradition in order to emulate the appearance of French portraiture. Painters like Johnson used specific stylistic elements that were repeated in each painting. For example, as Pleasants notes, the depiction of the sitters share many of the same characteristics. For the most part, they are shown three-quarter to full face, their sharply delineated features, staring emotionlessly at the viewer. Johnson utilized three to six variations of hand positions and a limited assortment of props. He also used a limited number of costume styles for his sitters particularly for women and

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[36]Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek. *Exposition des Portraits Francais de Largillièrre à Manet*. Copenhague: La Glyptothèque Ny Carlsberg, 1960. p.9.

[37]Ibid., 10.

female children who can be seen wearing French Empire classical style high waisted dresses. Johnson kept the dress style simple and elegant without the interruption and distraction of prints, patterns or multiple layers. This standardization of methods, allowed Johnson to work efficiently in order to earn a living. To individualize the subject he drew upon elements specific to the sitter such as the fashion of the clothing, hairstyle and jewelry. Academic ideas and principles of depicting the character of the sitter are not visually evident in his portraits.

Examples of French portraitists painting in a manner similar to Johnson's can be found. While not suggesting that Johnson saw these specific works, the following examples indicate that there was a prevalent "type" of French portrait painting that existed in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The work of Antoine Raspal (1738-1811) would be one example. Although he attended various academies, "ses portraits nous charment par leur naïve fraîcheur et l'éclat de leur tonalité."[38] His portrait, *Arlesienne En Costume Du XVIII Siècle* (Fig. 15), similar to Johnson's portraits employs the same painterly focus on the direct gaze toward the viewer and attention to the faithful rendition of the women's costume and jewelry.

Additionally, during the eighteenth century, the

[38]Museum Cantini. *Le Portrait en Provence, de Puget à Cézanne* . Marseille:1961, p.45.

"genre" portrait was developed by the academic painters and adapted by the French Provincial painters. There is a compositional difference in the way the sitters are treated by each of these groups. In the academic tradition, the positioning of figures is carefully orchestrated and leads to a composition that allows the viewer to see the sitters as a unit while viewing the painting as a whole.

In the provincial portraits, the organization of the figures in space seems to be random. To return to Raspal, in his painting *La Famille du Peintre*, (Fig. 16) the grouping is crowded into a limited space. Similarly, in *Portrait of a Family* ,(Fig. 17) by an unknown artist, a sense of compositional balance is somewhat lacking. The three-quarter turned faces, the direct gaze and the minimal shadowing provides "l'éclat de leur tonalité"--a reoccurring stylistic feature.[39] Jean-Baptiste Laurent's portrait of the *Family Card Game* (Fig. 18) is comprised of an awkwardly proportioned group of sitters, reinforcing the provincial painter's use of props (the cards) and hand play. Laurent's rendering of the eyes and eyelids with a thin attenuated line and a shadowless area below the lower lid echoes Johnson's approach. The spatial compositional problems of the group portrait prevalent in the non-academic works appear in some of Johnson's paintings, most notably in his *Unidentified Family Group* (Fig. 19).

Several of Johnson's paintings come close to the

[39]Ibid., 45

French genre portrait style. What makes genre portraits unique is the interplay between the figures and the objects that surround them. Although the figures may be interacting with their surrounding props, they seldom interact with each other. In an untitled portrait miniature probably of a mother and daughter, (Fig. 20) by Phillip Abraham Peticolas (1760-1841) a French emigré to Baltimore, each woman is holding an object. The woman on the right has a large portfolio (of prints or drawings?) in her left hand, while her right arm rests on a pianoforté. The woman on the left is holding what appears to be a letter in her right hand, while her left arm is draped over the pianoforté. The scene strikes the viewer as somewhat odd in that the women are not interacting with each other, but rather with the inanimate objects that surround them. Both women sit smiling, staring at the viewer as if unaware of each other's presence.[40] Similarly, the sitters in most of Johnson's paintings interact with the objects around them, and tend to stare blankly at the viewer rather than relating to other persons in the portrait.

If Johnson was influenced by the French Provincial tradition, then what are the distinguishing factors between French and American folk art? Without wishing to embark on a lengthy debate regarding American folk

[40]One could read the portrait as the mother and obviously cultured daughter are peering out to engage the absent letter writer (the husband and father?) to whom the miniature might have been sent.

portrait painting versus French Provincial portrait painting, it can be said that American folk artists generally engage in a less extravagant rendering of their sitters. The sitters' hairstyles, clothing, and accessories are shown in a plainly descriptive manner (Fig. 21), whereas the French, like Johnson, had a tendency towards embellishment or stylization of the figures and their costumes (Fig.22).

Where did Johnson develop a taste for the French Provincial tradition? Is it possible that he acquired this style from his proposed origins in Saint Dominique, or while studying in France? Before his country of origin is discussed, it is important identify first what influences were available to him in Baltimore. Several of Johnson's contemporaries working in Baltimore were French portrait and miniature painters. Among them were: Louis Chefdebien active (1779-1805), who restricted his work to portrait miniatures. Chefdebien also painted in Charleston, and was last recorded there in 1804. Jean Pierre Henri Elouis (1755-1840) immigrated to the United States at the outbreak of the French Revolution and came to Baltimore in 1791. J. F. Duvivier (active 1796-?), arrived in Baltimore in 1798, opened a museum in 1799 and an academy and remained there for approximately nine years. Finally, the aforementioned artist, Phillippe Abraham Peticolas arrived in Baltimore in 1798 and

practiced painting for six months.[41]

[41]Colwill, Stiles Tuttle. "A Chronicle of Artists in J.J's Baltimore" in C. J. Weekley. *Joshua Johnson: Freeman and Early American Portrait Painter.* (Williamsburg: Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center, 1987), p. 79

CHAPTER IV.

THE PAINTER AND HIS ORIGINS

Johnson is clearly identified as the artist of just two of the eighty or so paintings attributed to him. Even basic aspects of his life are unknown, such as whether his name was Johnson or Johnston. Indeed, the artist's name has been one of the questions that has baffled researchers for years. He was listed in the Baltimore City Directory as living at several addresses. He was originally cited as Joshua Johnston, and in 1800 and 1801 his name appeared as Joshua Johnson, "portrait painter". In 1810 his name returned to the city directory, and he was listed as "a limner". It was not until his name was listed in the 1817 Baltimore City Directory under the section "Free Householders of Color," that the artist's race was revealed.[42]

There is scant documentation on Johnson's life, but most other writers agree that he started out as a slave and later became a freeman. The next question regards his national origin. It is my contention that Johnson arrived in Baltimore circa 1787-91 after fleeing from Saint Dominique during the early stages of the slave revolts, as a free mulatto artist. Mulattos from this colony along

[42]Perry, Mary Lynn. "Joshua Johnson: His Historical Context and His Art." Master's Thesis, George Washington University Graduate School, 1983. p. 68.

with whites were the targets of the rebellion. Saint Dominique was thriving and considered the most prosperous of the slave colonies in the Caribbean. White indentured servants, known as "engagés" arrived from France and worked under contract with large numbers of slaves. As Carolyn Fick writes,

> The dominant white colonial planter class emerged in the eighteenth century and by the eve of the revolution constituted the most significant segment of the white population, for it was upon the plantation system and slave labor that the entire economy and wealth of Saint Dominique depended.[43]

The two main cultural centers in Saint Dominique were the cities Le Cap and Port-au-Prince; both centers of French culture. The French bourgeoisie and bureaucrats were known as the "grands blancs."[44] In the city and country lower and middle class whites served as plantation managers and were referred to as "petits blancs."[45] White society discriminated against both mulattos and blacks. Whites formed a common bond, despite the fact that their social and political backgrounds differed. They acted with an air of superiority afforded to them by their race.

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[43]Fick, Carolyn E. *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Dominique Revolution from Below.* Knoxville: The University of Tenn. Press, 1990. p.15-16.

[44]Ibid., 16.

[45]Ibid., 17.

> Their superiority thus extended not only over the entire mass of black slaves--some fifteen times their own number--but, as well, over the 'affranchis', or free persons of color, who constituted an intermediate sector of colonial society but those numbers, estimated roughly at twenty-seven thousand, nearly equaled that of the whites.[46]

Whites felt superior to the mulattos, a group that constituted the majority of the free persons of color. With the development of the sugar economy, the "petits blancs" realized that their chances of owning property were decreasing. They faced increased competition from the mulattos (affranchis) as well as slaves who were skilled tradesmen. Additionally,

> 'Affranchis' and slaves alike viewed the 'petit blanc' as an object of derision, thus further exacerbating the psychological effects of economic insecurity in a society where, without property ownership, entry into the upper echelons was all but impossible . . . . Only the 'grands blancs' the great sugar planters, were the real whites, the 'Blancs-blancs.'[47]

Because of their color, the free blacks and mulattos were a distinct group caught between the whites and slaves. By 1789, the creolization that occurred between

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[46]Ibid., 17.
[47]Ibid., 18.

white slave masters and their female slaves produced a sizable mulatto population. There was considerable competition between the mulattos and the lower and middle class whites for specialty trades. Hard work and frugality allowed some mulattos to gain fortunes that exceeded those of some whites.

> By 1789, the 'affranchis' owned one-third of the plantation property, one-quarter of the slaves, and one-quarter of the real estate property in Saint Dominique . . . a few had even 'infiltrated' the almost exclusively 'grand blanc' domain of the sugar plantation by becoming managers of the paternal estate upon the father's return to Europe or even inheritors of property upon the father's death. The 'affranchis' imitated white manners, were often educated in France, and, in turn, sent their own children abroad to be educated.[48]

It is conceivable that Johnson could have been a first or most likely second generation affranchis who was educated in France. During the Saint Dominique slave revolts, many affranchis in France were prevented from returning to the island and some may have come to America.

In Saint Dominique, whites prevented free mulattos and blacks from working at particular specialized trades such as goldsmithing. Perhaps Johnson did not feel that he could successfully practice his trade in Saint

[48]Ibid., 20.

Dominique and portrait painting would be better received in America.

In 1791, the second year of the French Revolution, the slaves of Saint Dominique revolted. After twelve years of conflict, the slaves defeated not only their white neighbors but a French army sent to repress the revolt, as well. C. L. R. James notes,

> The revolt is the only successful slave revolt in history, and the odds it had to overcome is evidence of the magnitude of the interests that were involved. The transformation of slaves, trembling in hundreds before a single white man, into a people able to organize themselves and defeat the most powerful European nations of their day, is one of the great epics of revolutionary struggle and achievement.[49]

Religion played a major role in the lives of the people of Saint Dominique. Catholicism was the only religion allowed in the colony, therefore all slaves were baptized in the Catholic Church. Black and mulatto Catholics were a rarity in all but a few places outside of Saint Dominique. One of those places was Baltimore. Therefore, it is only a logical assumption that Johnson came from Saint Dominique to Baltimore, both strongholds of the Catholic faith.

In the eighteenth century there was conflict among

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[49]James, C. L. R. *The Black Jacobins: Tousaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution.* New York: Vintage Books, 1963. IX.

various religious orders over the rights and privileges of missionary activities. The French Monarchy favored the Jesuits. The Church required that children receive a religious education as early as possible because "slaves who had been taught properly possessed none of the coarseness of their parents, and spoke French with greater facility than most of the peasants and artisans in France." Jesuits, due to their favored status in Saint Dominique were responsible for teaching black slaves. "They also imparted sufficient business training to their slaves to make them useful in a variety of capacities in Jesuit economic enterprises."[50] The Jesuits were reprimanded by the governor's Upper Council for interacting too closely with slaves and treating them like servants. The Jesuit order was expelled from the colony in 1763, "on charges of 'being in complicity with the slaves'" that is, encouraging the "spirit of rebellion and liberation."[51]

Civil liberties were very limited for people of color in Saint Dominique. The violence of the revolts and the desire for personal and religious freedom led many residents to emigrate. During a two week period in 1793 one thousand whites including many priests, five hundred slaves and an unknown number of mulattos arrived in

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[50]Breathett George. *The Catholic Church in Haiti (1704-1785)* . Salisbury,North Carolina: Documentary Publications, 1982. p.10

[51]Garrett, Mitchell Bennett. *The French Colonial Question*. New York: Negro Universities Press, 1970. p.65

Baltimore.

As previously stated, Johnson was not in this group of refugees, because he most likely fled Saint Dominique at the beginning of the hostilities in 1787 and arrived in Baltimore before the recorded Baptism of his son on June 2, 1793. However, his first listing as a resident of Baltimore is in the city directory for 1796 and his first newspaper advertisement appeared in 1798.[52]

If Johnson did indeed arrive from Saint Dominique, why did he not have a French name? There are several possible explanations. Among them: "They [mulattos in Saint Dominique] were forbidden to take the name of their former master and natural parent."[53] Additionally once free, people of color who reached American shores often adopted Biblical names, which not only identified their Christian faith, but served as a mark of personal identity. "For people limited in their ability to control important aspects of their own lives, this partial power over their identity was one affirmation of their humanity, individuality, and personal freedom." Surnames were often chosen from friends, admired individuals or heroes; "a name change generally marked some rite of passage, a new stage of life or unforeseen occurrence."[54]

For the black and mulatto refugees, life in

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[52]Colwill, Stiles Tuttle. "A Chronicle of Artists in J.J's Baltimore" in C. J. Weekley. (Williamsburg: Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center, 1987), p. 75

[53]Fick, p. 21.

[54]Horton, James Oliver. *Free People of Color*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993. p. 154,155.

America brought both opportunity as well as discrimination and disappointment.

CHAPTER V.

MARYLAND SLAVE HISTORY - FREE BLACKS IN BALTIMORE AND BLACK CATHOLICS

If Johnson was a freeman who resided in Maryland during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, he was subject to the same Maryland laws as other blacks. "Whatever may have been the distinction of . . . Johnston; [his] fame did not affect much [of] the most horrendous manner in which blacks were treated by the average white."[55] Johnson described himself in a newspaper advertisement as an artist who had "experienced many insuperable obstacles in the pursuit of his studies . . . ."[56]

In order to fully understand Johnson, it is important to understand the slave history of Maryland, the state in which Johnson worked and probably spent most of his life. The following brief history of Maryland laws governing slavery and free blacks will illustrate the constraints placed on Johnson as he practiced his trade. I assume that even though he was a free, light skinned mulatto, he would have had some experiences in common with

[55]Graham, Leroy. *Baltimore the Nineteenth Century Black Capital*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1982. p. 26.

[56]Johnston, Joshua. "Portrait Painting" (advertisement), *Baltimore Intelligencer*. December 19, 1798. p.1

other blacks in Maryland.

Baltimore, was one of the largest slave trading ports in the country, yet it became the most popular area for free blacks to live. "The blacks of Baltimore constituted one of the largest black populations (in the United States) of the nineteenth century, and thus, this fact alone would make it a significant place in black life in this period."[57] It was attractive to free blacks because people tended to ignore the Maryland laws that prohibited whites from teaching reading and writing skills to blacks. Free blacks, allowed to learn trades, played a larger role as artisans in Maryland.[58] Many free blacks went to Baltimore specifically searching for jobs as laundresses, shipyard workers, and servants.[59] There were more opportunities for artisans in port cities like Baltimore. There was also greater chance of advancement within the artisan and craftsmen trades. It was in Baltimore that Joshua Johnson was listed in the city directories as "a limner" and "portrait painter"[60] Even so, free blacks were in an unusual position and were caught between two worlds. They were neither slaves nor

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[57]Graham, Leroy. *Baltimore the Nineteenth Century Black Capital*. Lanham, MD.: University Press of America, 1982. p.252.

[58]Perry, Mary Lynn. "Joshua Johnson; His Historical Context and His Art." Master's Thesis, George Washington University Graduate School, 1983. p. 24-27.

[59]Brugger, Robert J. *Maryland A Middle Temperament 1634-1980*. Maryland: Johns Hopkins University press with the Maryland Historical Society, 1988. p. 211.

[60]Fine, Elsa Honig. *The Afro-American Artist*. New York: Hacker press, 1982. p. 23.

citizens, "Free Negroes were the solitary soldiers in the no-man's land between slavery and freedom."[61] Free blacks identified with the slaves, since their parents may have been slaves and had perhaps purchased their freedom. When blacks were released from slavery they had little savings, if any, few belongings and a great deal of frustration. "Free Negroes fought consistently against discrimination, enlisted in the anti-slavery campaign, and struggled to improve the black community, to maintain their self-esteem, and to overcome their poverty and ignorance." racial pride, family, religion and association with liberal Whites, were among the few things that helped sustain the free blacks and give them hope.[62]

While most free blacks associated with slaves, wealthy free blacks seldom interacted with the slave population. Infact, many owned slaves. Some free blacks in Louisiana, Florida and Alabama emphasized their European origins and looked down on other blacks. In most cases, lighter skin was the most distinguishing feature of the black elite.[63]

Although the black elite may have identified with white society, they did provide some support for less fortunate free blacks by establishing schools, churches and other organizations. However, even though they were

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[61]Berry, Mary Frances and Blassingame, John W. *Long Memory*. New York: Oxford University press, 1963. p. 33.

[62]Ibid., 34.

[63]Ibid., 37.

free from physical bondage, free blacks and slaves living in the same communities, worked in the same fields and workshops. Slaves would often patronize the stores owned by free blacks.

As the number of free blacks increased in all the states, so did laws that intended to suppress them. Free blacks could be sent back into servitude at any time, and many were kidnapped into slavery. Some states required them to have white guardians, akin to having a master. In the south free blacks had to carry a certificate of freedom with them at all times and official permission was needed to travel from county to county.

As early as 1802, Maryland denied the vote to free blacks. Additionally, Maryland law contained several statutes limiting the independence of free blacks. For example, if they planned to stay in the state they were obliged to find work or face bondage. And only those free blacks who had white ancestry on their mother's side, had access to the court system.

Despite prejudice, black artisans moved to cities and towns that could support a market for their craft, artisan-painters among them. Although Baltimore offered artisans and laborers better opportunities then most cities, "'the moral and physical condition of the free Negroes in Baltimore is worse than that of a slave, [it] is a fact to which all intelligent men with whom I have conversed most fully bear testimony,'" remarked a visitor

from the North. These conditions probably account for Baltimore death records (kept after 1824) indicating the highest mortality rate was among free blacks.[64]

Free blacks could find support within their own community. Religion helped to give the community hope. There were times however, when "they were so oppressed that they doubted the very existence of God."[65]

Of thirteen colonies Maryland had the largest community of black Catholics.

> Baltimore received what was to be the nucleus of the black Catholic community in that city with the arrival of people of color on July 10, 1793. The Annapolis newspaper announced the event the following day. 'Yesterday at three o'clock, arrived at Fells' Point, six ships (one a Guineaman, with Negroes) four brigs, and four schooners, being part of the fleet which sailed from Cape Francois on the 23d ultimo. The passengers and crews amount to 619 persons.'
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> These were refugees, both whites and blacks, from the revolution then taking place on the island of Santo Domingo in what is present day Haiti. The French-speaking blacks some time

[64]Brugger, Robert J. *Maryland A Middle Temperament 1634-1980*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press with The Maryland Historical Society, 1988. p. 211.

[65]Berry, Mary Frances and John W Blassingame. *Long Memory*. New York: Oxford University press, 1963. p. 52.

> later found a spiritual home in the basement chapel of the Sulpician seminary on Paca street.[66]

The French Sulpicians were a religious order whose members settled in Baltimore after fleeing the French Revolution. The Sulpicians assumed the responsibility for the care of the refugees. Their common language, and religion made them a natural choice for helping and educating blacks.

As in all Catholic churches, the Sulpicians maintained attendance records for special holidays when church attendance was mandatory. Those special holy days, such as Easter, were known as Holy Days of Obligation. If you were a Catholic in good standing and you attended Easter Mass, you fulfilled your Easter "Duty." In the attendance list journal, names were placed in racial categories. The Easter Duty list is referred to as Confessions Pascales. Under Femmes de Coulour in 1824, a Sarah Johnson is listed and in 1825, under Filles Negre, Mary Anne Johnson is listed. In 1831, under Filles de Coulour, Mary A. Johnson is listed. These women may or may not have been related to Joshua. He had a daughter named Mary who was born in 1796 and a wife named Sarah

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[66]Davis, Cyprian. *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1990. p.85

whose dates are unknown.[67] The Easter Duty lists are divided into the following racial categories: for males: "les messieurs," "hommes blanc," or "hommes de coulour," for females: "les dames Francois [*sic*]," "filles de coulour," "les negresses," and "dames Americaines." The terminology varied from year to year. Additionally, "filles mull. [mulatto]" was used.[68] These lists may not be relevant to Joshua's life because Johnson is a common name. However, there is a strong probability that the Mary and Sarah shown on the lists were his daughter and wife continuing to be faithful to their Catholic duties.

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[67]Piet,Stanley G.[Catholic]*Church Records in Baltimore from 1782-1800*.Baltimore: Family Line Publishers, 1989. lists:

George Johnson; born April 17, 1792; baptized June 2, 1793 : son of Joshua and Sarah.
John Johnson; born November 24, 1786, baptized June 2, 1793: son of Joshua and Sarah.
Mary Johnson; born October 1, 1796; baptized December 4. 1796: daughter of Joshua and Sarah.
Sarah Johnson; Born November 15, 1794, baptized May 10, 1795: (died at eleven months) daughter of Joshua and Sarah.
N.B. George Johnson seems to be an additional son who is not mentioned in Weekley.

[68]St. Mary's Seminary Easter Duty Lists. The distinction between filles de coulour, filles mull, and les negresses is curious. Would the latter have been darker than the other two or the equivalent of black as opposed to light skinned?

CHAPTER VI.

THE FACILITATOR - JOSEPH-PIERRE PICOT DE LIMOËLAN CLORIVIÈRE

Among those who fled to America during the French Revolution was Joseph-Pierre Picot de Limoëlan Clorivière. Born in Brittany in 1768, he was not an ordinary man. He was an officer in the French Royal Army, a miniature painter, and finally, a priest serving the episcopate of John Carroll.

While in France, Clorivière was involved in a highly dangerous and illegal plot to assassinate Napoleon Bonaparte. Clorivière and his co-conspirators constructed a bomb filled with shrapnel. It was Clorivière's responsibility to signal his co-conspirator, named Soyer Saint-Regent, when he saw Napoleon's carriage approach the designated target area. On the chosen day, Saint-Regent was waiting for Clorivière's signal, but for undetermined reasons, Clorivière failed to give it. Frustrated, Saint-Regent lit the fuse that ignited the bomb. The timing was off. Consequently, it exploded after Napoleon's carriage passed. It was during this assassination attempt, known by the name of the bomb type as the plot of the *Infernal Machine*, that eight or nine innocent bystanders were killed and several injured. Most unfortunate was the

death of a young girl, who had been coaxed by Saint-Regent for a few cents to hold the reins of the horse while he made pseudo-repairs on the wagon that contained the bomb. The girl was left holding the reins when the bomb was ignited and was brutally killed.[69]

Clorivière and Saint-Regent escaped without serious injury, and Clorivière went into hiding. Clorivière's Uncle, Reverend Pierre-Joseph Picot de Clorivière, helped him find refuge in the unused vaults of Saint Lawrence's Church in Paris.[70] Clorivière remained in hiding while his co-conspirators were caught, brought to trial, sentenced to death and guillotined.

Some time between 1800 and 1802, Clorivière fled to America to escape the French police. In France, Clorivière left his family and his fiancée, Mlle. Julie d'Albert. Even though Clorivière had left for America, he was still hoping to marry Mlle d'Albert, but when he wrote to her to propose he was shocked by her answer. She declined, telling him that she vowed that if God would save Clorivière from execution then she would devote the rest of her life to celibacy and commit the remainder of her existence to charity work.[71] There is no doubt that her actions and the affair of the *Infernal Machine* had a profound effect on Clorivière's decision to become a

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[69]I am indebted to Richard Cain Madden's *Joseph-Pierre Picot de Limoëlan Clorivière (1768-1826)* unpublished Master's Thesis, The Catholic University of America. Washington, DC 1938 for his research on the subject.

[70]Ibid., 21.

[71]Ibid., 37.

priest.

Clorivière arrived in Savannah, Georgia around 1803, a location with a sizable French Catholic community, including refugees from Saint Dominique. While in Savannah, Clorivière became deeply involved in church activities, became the spokesperson for his church and eventually began his path towards priesthood. It was no surprise that he wanted to become a priest for "He was . . . a religious man. He fought against the leaders of the Revolution, because they were enemies not only of the King, but also of the church."[72]

During his time in America, Clorivière was an avid portrait miniature painter. The figures in Clorivière's miniatures according to Madden have "strong characterizations, however, carefully modeled, quaint, narrow-shouldered, little figures."[73] All of these stylistic attributes are common in French Provincial painting and are evident in Johnson's work as well.

Clorivière began his studies for the priesthood at age forty, a difficult age to undertake the lengthy process. However, he was not without support. Archbishop John Carroll "had a deep interest in Clorivière, since he was the nephew of his [Carroll's] fellow Jesuit and former pupil at Liège."[74] Clorivière's uncle was also "noted as

[72]Ibid., 43.
[73]Ibid., 41.
[74]Ibid., 45.

one of the restorers of the Society of Jesus in France."[75] In 1808, Clorivière entered St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore and in 1812 was ordained by Carroll. After his ordination, Carroll assigned Clorivière to St. Mary's Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

Clorivière's letters are filled with references to his intense interest in working with slaves and free blacks, especially those who had immigrated from French-speaking Saint Dominique. While these letters were written after his days in Baltimore, they inform us of his attitude regarding blacks, both before and after Charleston. The following excerpts are from letters written by Clorivière to John Carroll or Leonard Neale, who replaced Carroll after the Archbishop's death in 1815.

> But I find myself in this house so unacceptable to those who would want my services, that I would preffer [*sic*] to submit to other privations and have an independent home, where I might receive and instruct some poor ignorant people of color who cannot learn their Catechism, with children . . . these present me with the only expectation I have of doing some good.[76]

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[75]Sullivan, Eleanore C. *Georgetown Visitation Since 1799.* Baltimore: French-Bray Printing Co., 1975. p. 70. (The society was suppressed by the Pope in 1773.and restored in 1814)

[76]Charleston, S.C. November 16, 1812 -Folder 2Q1-2Q11, Letter 2Q4 To Carroll Archdiocese of Baltimore Archives.

I had, in vain, attempted last winter to begin a catechism for the French people of color--I have better succeeded now--I have appointed a convenient hour, after sunset--the only time when they can be got--their work being finished--only once in the week--and therefore [illegible] and first times, they have been numerous enough--and shown good dispositions. The thing being [illegible] readable to some persons--they have attributed [the owners] the eagerness of their servants to some flattery that I use, say they, to conjole these people, and I am informed that they will come this evening to examine me--. I am very glad of it--because I have precisely to relate to theme [*sic*] history of the mediation of Canaan and his being doomed to be servies servorum fratribus juis--therefore slavery is not opposed to the law of God etc. They do not know probably that I am not even a great friend of the liberty of the White.[77]

Endeavor to bring them to things which they will not come to. He would not expect to find better depositions in Savannah nor in Augusta [Georgia]--Particularly in the latter place

[77]Charleston, S,C. November 2, 1813-Folder 2Q1-2Q1, letter 2Q6 to Carroll Archdiocese of Baltimore Archives.

> where they have had a priest only for 4 years, but a priest who neither taught nor required anything from them in Savannah, the Rev. M. Carles is a man of regular habits and good behavior but rather sickly, cold or tepid: his chapel is in a most languishing state 15 or 20 people of color are the edifying part of it [begging not to be sent to Savannah or Augusta].[78]

Unfortunately, Clorivière faced some conflict with a new pastor and in 1814, due to their disagreements, Clorivière requested of Carroll that he be allowed to return to France. Clorivière was away for only brief time before he returned to America in 1815 and went back to Charleston. Once back in Charleston, he still experienced irreconcilable differences with the other clergy and to remedy the situation Carroll offered Clorivière a post at The Convent of the Visitation in Georgetown, DC, in 1819.

In his sermons delivered to the sisters at his new post, Clorivière frequently returned to the topic of slavery. He used slavery as a metaphor for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ especially when the sisters for whom he served as pastor, renewed their vows. For example, on November 21, 1821 he refers to their voluntary slavery to serve Christ:

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[78]Charleston S.C. February 12, 1816, Folder 12G1-12 i 15, Letter 12H7 to Neale. Archdiocese of Baltimore Archives.

> People in this world exteem [*sic*] but liberty . . . even those whom <u>providence</u> has <u>destined</u> to serve (Negroes) dream of liberty as the servant of all happiness and you . . . born free and independent--have resigned that liberty and independence to submit to laws which the slaves in the world and themselves think harder than their slavery.[79]

> Others boast of their liberity [*sic*]--may they truly be free from the tyranny of their passion and your dear sister [*sic*] you glory in your <u>Slavery</u>--but like St. Paul, you may say, 'I am in chains,' and you prefer these <u>chains</u> to the independence and to the possession of the whole world--is not this preference given to you to your God--glorious to Him, especially after the experience you have already acquired--at His service?[80]

These passages offer a strong indication that the concept of slavery and the meaning of freedom occupied Clorivière's mind. It seems likely that he would have been predisposed to a friendship with Johnson and in helping this French speaking Catholic artist of color obtain a sitting with their Bishop. Knowing that

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[79]Convent of the Visitation box 1820-25, book 2, November 7, 1819--March 5, 1820. p. 8,9

[80]Convent of the Visitation box 1820-25, book 2, November 21, 1821.

Clorivière had an interest in educating blacks strengthens the case in favor of his and Johnson's shared interest in the portrait and Clorivière's connection as facilitator for the commission.

While Clorivière clearly had an interest in helping blacks, was there the concurrence of time and place to support this thesis? In 1806 Clorivière practiced as a miniature painter in Baltimore. In 1807, he joined The Sulpician Seminary of St. Mary's in Baltimore,[81] studied for the priesthood and was ordained by John Carroll in 1812.

Although the portrait of John Carroll is currently attributed to Johnson by scholars based on stylistic attributes common to his work, it was previously assigned to Jeremiah Paul (1760-1820).[82] Paul also worked in Baltimore (1806-08) and was involved with the production of an engraving of Carroll. This 1812 engraving of Carroll inscribed "painted by J. Paul"[83] and engraved by William S. Leney (1769-1831) and Benjamin Tanner (1775-1848) (Fig.23) has led scholars to conclude that the portrait in question was painted by Paul and was the source of the engraving.

Furthermore, the attribution to Paul was strengthened

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[81]After one last southern trip to Savannah and Augusta, apparently not receiving sufficient artistic encouragement to continue his career as an artist.

[82]Carolyn J. Weekley, et al, with whom I concur.

[83]Information courtesy of Georgetown University. Washington, DC Office of the Curator, University Art Collection.

by the fact that he did exhibit a portrait of *Bishop Carroll* (unlocated) in the 1813 exhibition of The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and it has long been assumed that this portrait was the one now attributed to Johnson.[84] Stylistically, however, Paul's known works do not resemble the portrait of the Bishop. Paul's style is more in line with academic traditions than Johnson's and exhibits evidence of formal training (Fig. 24). Additionally, Paul was explicitly denied a sitting by Carroll "in deference to [Gilbert] Stuart."[85]

However, the Bishop was desirous of having an engraving created based on the Stuart portrait. To accomplish the matter, knowing Stuart could not afford the time to make an engraving, Carroll chose Paul for the task. In a letter dated July 9, 1806, Carroll requested of James Barry, owner of the Gilbert Stuart portrait, that Paul be granted access to it in order to execute preliminary drawings for the engraving.[86] The resulting engraving is a composite of the portrait which is the subject of this investigation and the portrait by Stuart. I take the position that Paul used the Johnson and Stuart paintings to prepare sketches for the engraving.

The Johnson portrait shows Carroll in a half length

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[84]Rutledge, Anna Wells, ed. *Cumulative Record of Exhibitions Catalogs, The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts., 1807-1870 the Society of Artists, 1800-1814, The Artists' Fund Society, 1835-45.* Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1955. p.18.

[85]John Carroll to James Barry, Archives of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, July 9, 1806, 9c. 8.

[86]Ibid., 9c. 8.

standing position with a plain background. The Stuart portrait shows Carroll in a seated position with a library backdrop. Paul used the head from Johnson's portrait and combined it with the body from the Stuart portrait. The engraving contains an artful blend of the two portraits. Carroll, in the engraving, faces in the same direction as he does in the Stuart painting. From the Stuart portrait he has borrowed the background of books and curtain as well as the body and hand position. Stuart's mannerism of eliminating one finger of the hand that holds the book is changed by Paul (or the printer) to include all four fingers in the engraving. The size of the book is enlarged and the finger positions are changed. The book is in the same relative position in the Tanner etching as in the Stuart painting, while in the Johnson painting, the book is in the opposite hand, with only the forefinger inserted in the pages. Tanner's engraving shows Carroll wearing a pectoral cross which stylistically seems to be a mix of the crosses in the Johnson and Stuart paintings. The tassel holding the stole around Carroll's neck is modest in Johnson's painting (there is no stole in the Stuart) and more stylized in the engraving.

The engraving, a pastiche of the two portraits, supports the fact that the portrait in question existed before the engraving was printed in 1812, some six years after Carroll's letter to Barry. Because the Johnson portrait was not mentioned in Carroll's letter of

introduction for Paul's visit to Barry on July 9, 1806, it probably did not exist and had to have been painted between July 9, 1806 and 1812.

The date the portrait was painted could be more precisely narrowed down to Clorivière's presence in Baltimore as early as the week of May 12, 1806 (approximately two months before Carroll's letter of introduction) through April 1, 1807.[87] More likely it was painted between October 21, 1806 and April 1, 1807 the date Clorivière departed Baltimore for Savannah and Augusta (June 27, 1807). He returned to Baltimore in the fall of 1807 to enter the Seminary.

For a slightly less than six months, Clorivière lived in Johnson's neighborhood. An October 21, 1806 advertisement in the Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser, Maryland p.3-4, confirms the location

> LIKENESSES
>
> Will be taken in MINIATURE, by Mr. Clorivière, in Second-street, at Mr. Bannerman's, two doors from the Phoenix Insurance Office.[88]

Mr. Bannerman's on Second street near Gay was two blocks south of Johnson's residence on 52 North Gay street.

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[87]In an ad of 12 April 1806 Savannah, "[I] will leave this place in the course of three weeks." (allowing a week for travel--arriving in Baltimore May 12th.)

[88]John Bannerman, "engraver, Second near Gay Street." (Balt. Directory, Citizen's Registry, James McHenry 1807, no.70, p. 15). Phoenix Insurance Office, "Second near Gay" (Balt. Directory, Citizen's Registry, James McHenry 1807, no.70, p. 98).

CHAPTER VII.

CONCLUSION

Joshua Johnson is a complex figure and there are many ambiguities concerning his life. To date, there is no concrete evidence that allows scholars to make definitive statements about Johnson's origins, artistic influences, family or other areas of his background. Instead, we are left to speculate about him according to the limited material available.

Scholars will develop the most accurate account of Johnson based on what few facts are known, such as, his listing as a free householder of color and portrait painter in the 1817 Baltimore City Directory, his first newspaper advertisement in 1798 and second and last in 1802, which describe his talent for taking likenesses. It was also likely that Johnson was a light complexioned mulatto[89] for the 1800 census in Baltimore did not list his race, yet listed a member of his household as a "free black."[90] It can be assumed that Johnson was French speaking since he signed the bottom of one of his

[89]He may have "passed" for white and with a French manner, created a favorable impression on white sitters.

[90]Jackson, Ronald V., et al. *Maryland 1800 Census Index.* Bountiful, Utah: Accelerated Indexing Systems, Inc., 1976. p. 76.

paintings with the month "Oct<u>bre</u>". His Catholic religion is strongly suggested through his children's baptismal records.

Information regarding Johnson's artistic influences and style of painting is left to art historical interpretation. While current Johnson scholars claim that his work is appropriated from the English portrait painting tradition, especially the work of the Peales, other evidence exists to challenge this supposition. As illustrated earlier, none of Johnson's paintings can be linked stylistically to the Peales. However, as I have attempted to show, Johnson's work can be linked to the French Provincial tradition. Aside from stylistic attributes in Johnson's work which support this tradition, other French influences include his likely origins in French-speaking Saint Dominique and his possible tutelage in France, where many mulattos from Saint Dominique sent their children to study. Additionally, Johnson resided near several French painters in Baltimore.

Among the French painters practicing in Baltimore was Clorivière whose work shows similarities to Johnson's. I noted these, particularly in Johnson's painting of John Carroll and the engraving of Carroll after Clorivière's miniature. No previous scholar has been able to account for the manner in which Johnson obtained a portrait sitting with Carroll, a sitting that was denied to Rembrandt Peale. After theorizing that there may be some

connection between Johnson, Clorivière and the Carroll portrait, I concluded that Clorivière was the only logical conduit through which Johnson obtained a sitting from Carroll. My thesis is supported by these facts: Johnson, was a French-speaking Catholic person of color and probably a Saint Dominique refugee.[91] His work, as I demonstrated, is French Provincial. Clorivière, was the author of a miniature of Carroll painted in the French Provincial tradition, and was a French-speaking Catholic Priest with a connection to Carroll. Clorivière also showed a predilection for educating blacks, particularly refugees from Saint Dominique. Carroll, the first Catholic Archbishop of Baltimore was trained in France and was a close friend of Clorivière and his uncle, and was concerned about slavery and the welfare of blacks. Additionally, all three men resided in Baltimore during the time Johnson painted Carroll's portrait.

There are too many connections between these three figures to deny a relationship. It is unfortunate that there is no concrete evidence to support fully my thesis. But like pieces of a puzzle the known facts about Johnson, Clorivière and Carroll seem to fit, thereby creating a new picture. Dr. J. Hall Pleasants who wrote the first article on Johnson in 1942 in the *Maryland Historical Magazine*, deserves credit for introducing us to Johnson.

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[91]During the political unrest in France and Saint Dominique, it is possible that Johnson was studying in France and unable to return to Saint Dominique fled to America.

He was the first to conjecture that Johnson came from the West Indies. It is the duty of current researchers to attempt to recreate Johnson's background. With each lacuna that is filled, we come closer to understanding the history of this artist.

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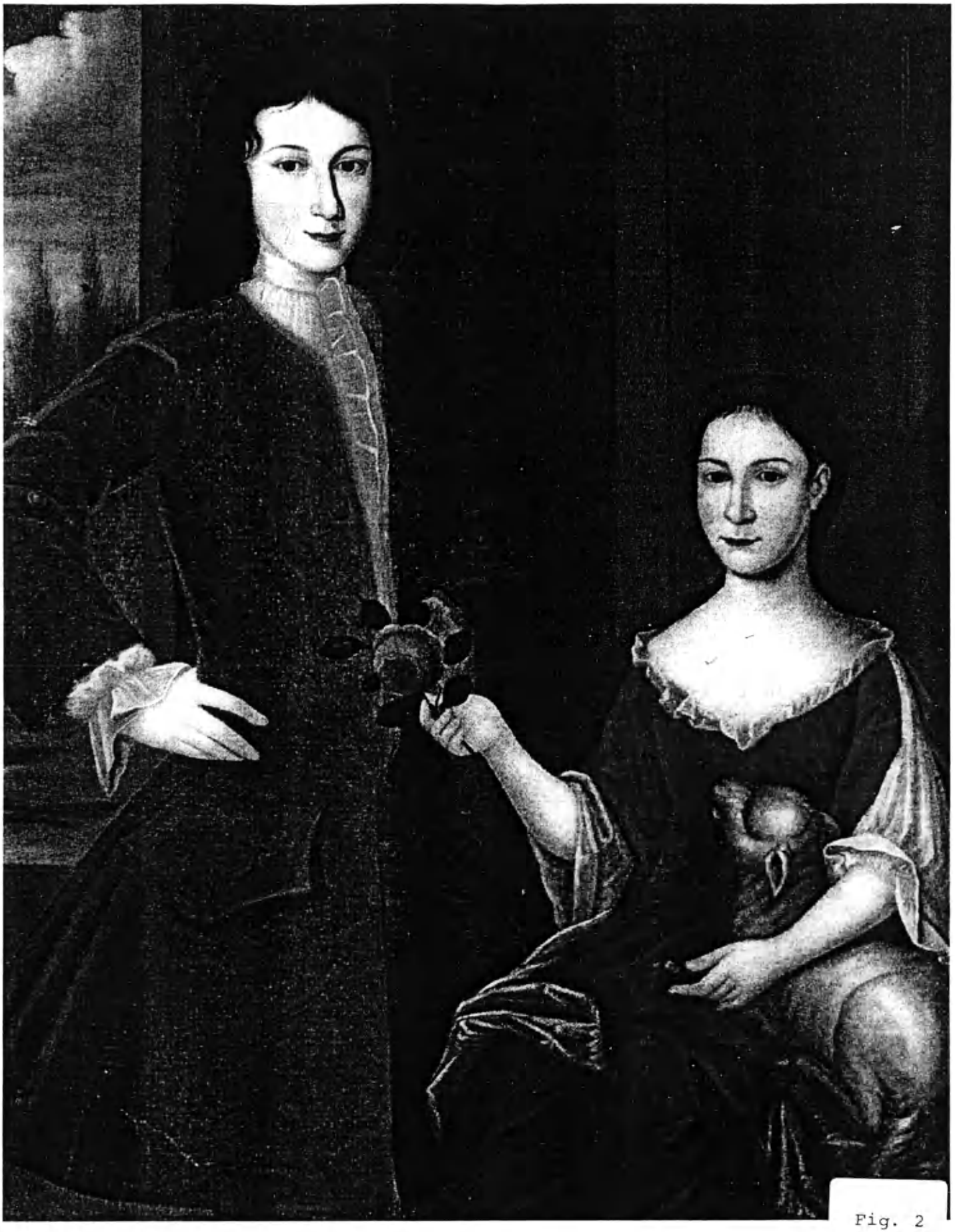
Fig. 1



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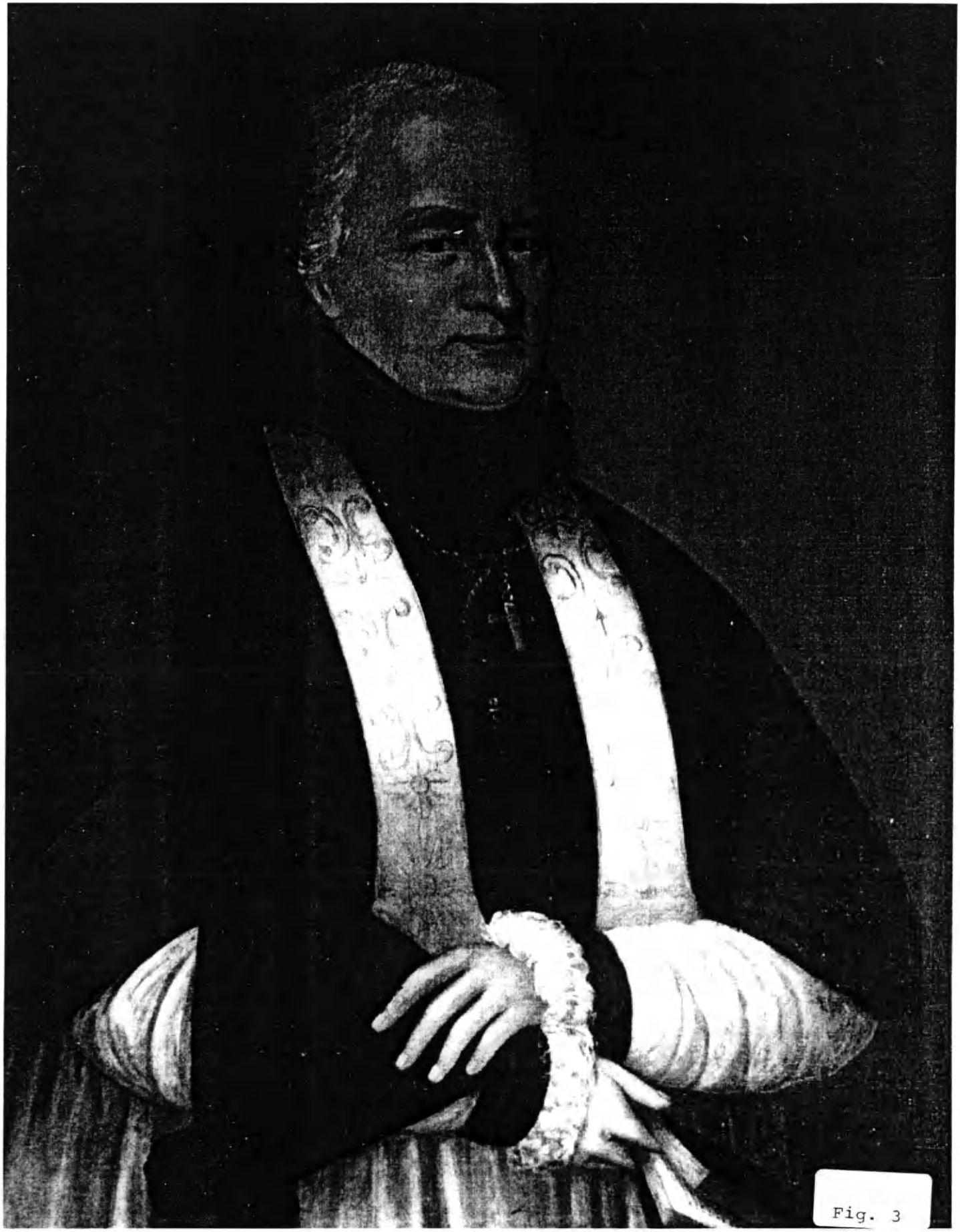


Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

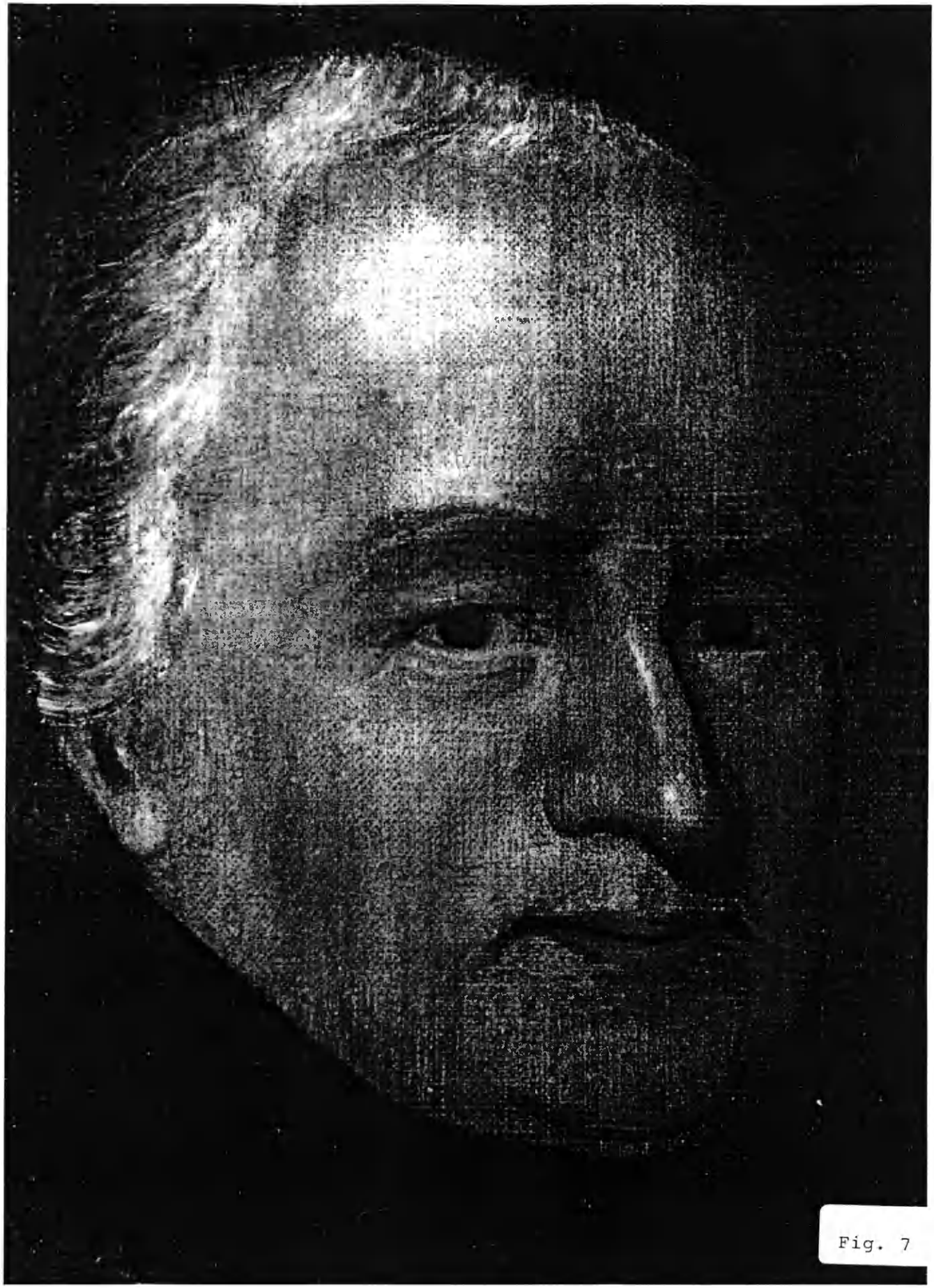


Fig. 7

Fig. 8

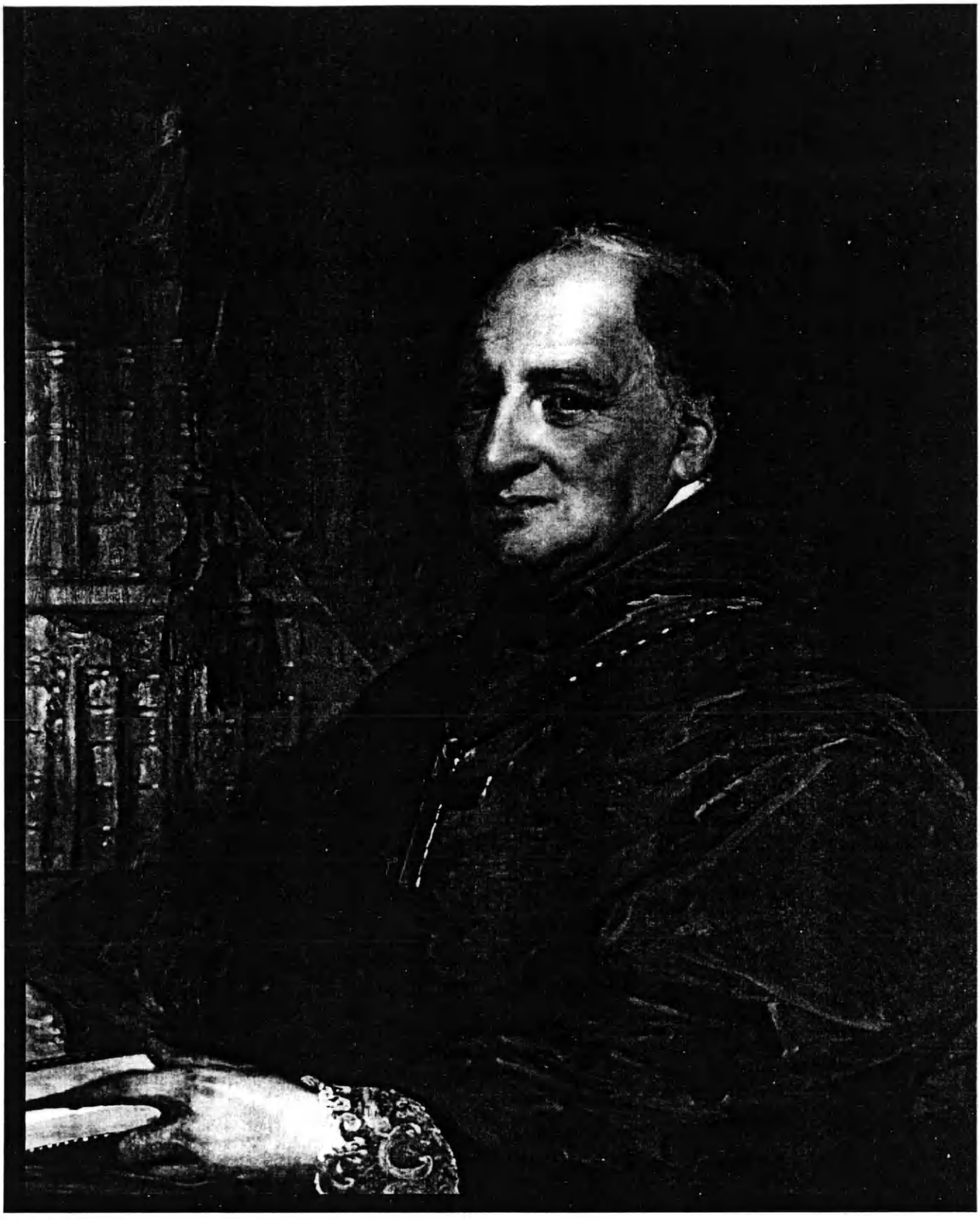
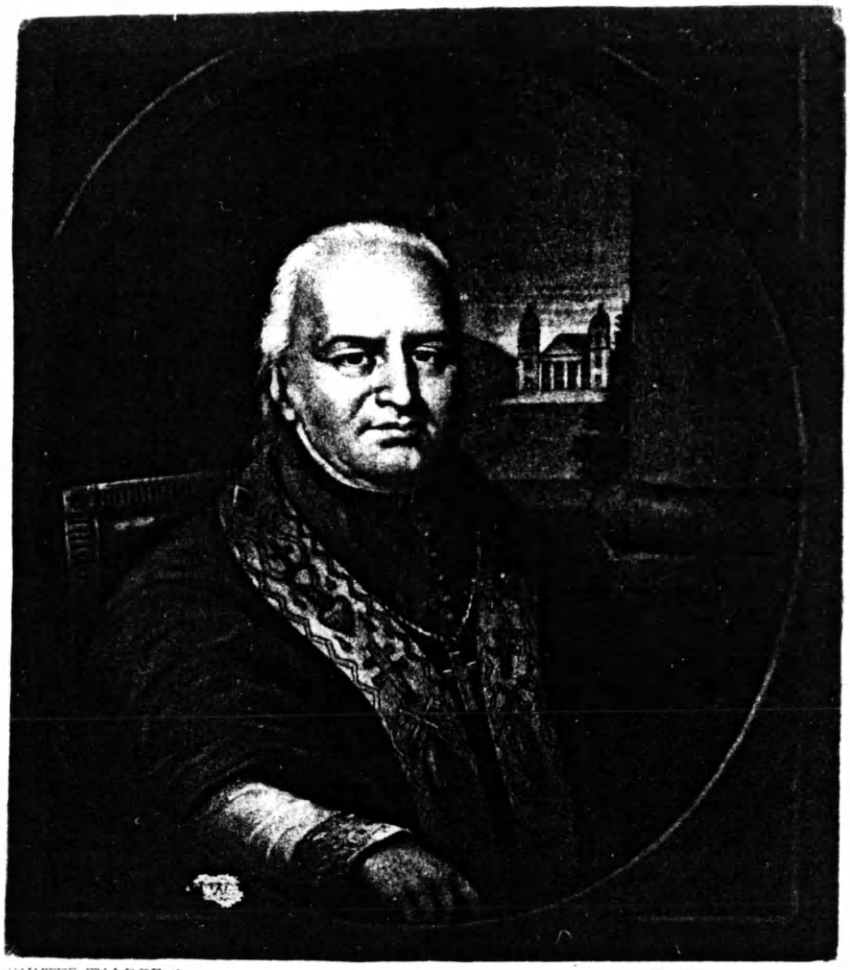


Fig. 9

Fig. 10

Fig. 11



PAINTED BY J.P.DE C

The Most Rev. John Carroll

First Archbishop of Baltimore

Pub'd by John Murphy, Baltimore

Fig. 12

The Most Rev. Leonard Neale
Second Archbishop of Baltimore

Pub[d] by John Murphy, Baltimore.

Fig.13

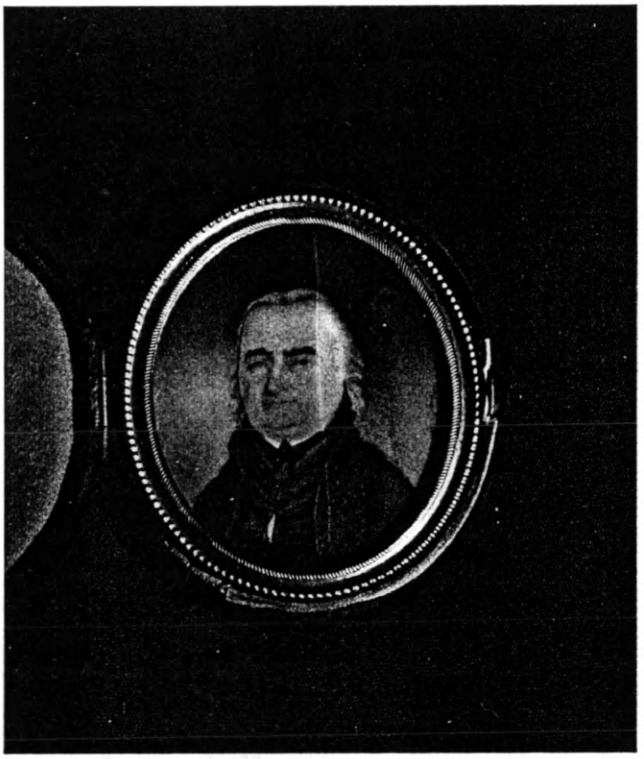


Fig.14

46

Fig. 15

44 *La famille du peintre* — Antonio Rasmal (Huile sur toile, [illegible])

Fig. 16

Fig.17

Fig. 18

Fig. 19

Fig. 20

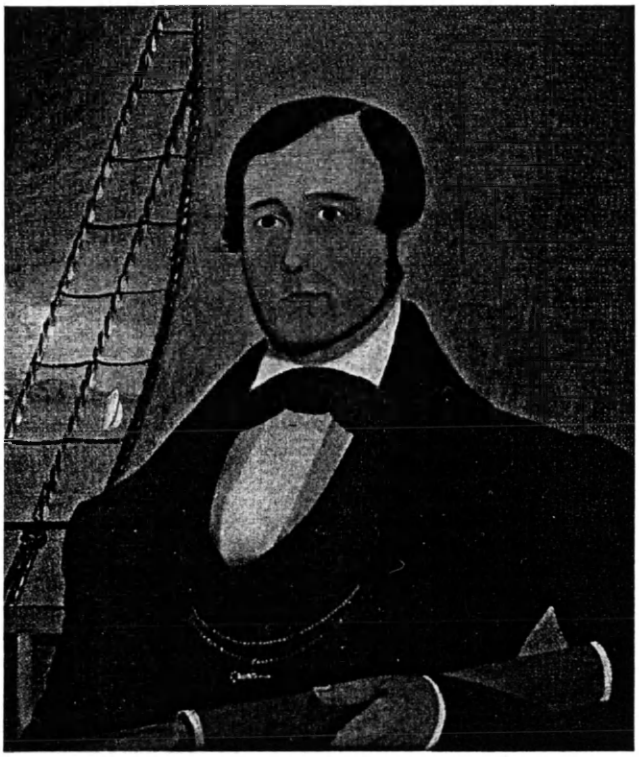


Fig. 21

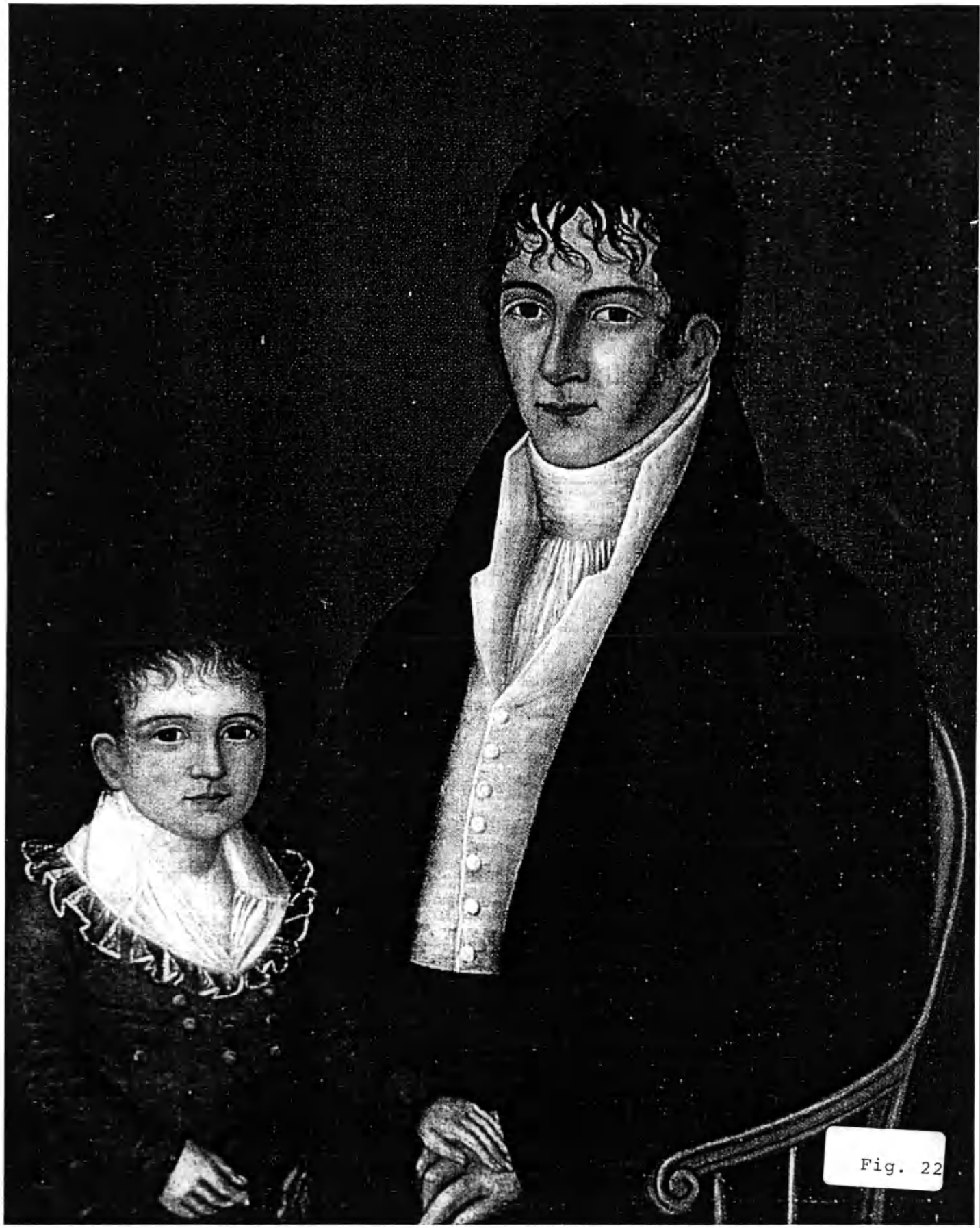


Fig. 22

...RED CARROLL, S.T.D.
...RIENSIS PRIMUS.

The Most Reverend
JOHN CARROLL, D.D.
FIRST ARCHBISHOP OF BALTIMORE.

Fig.23

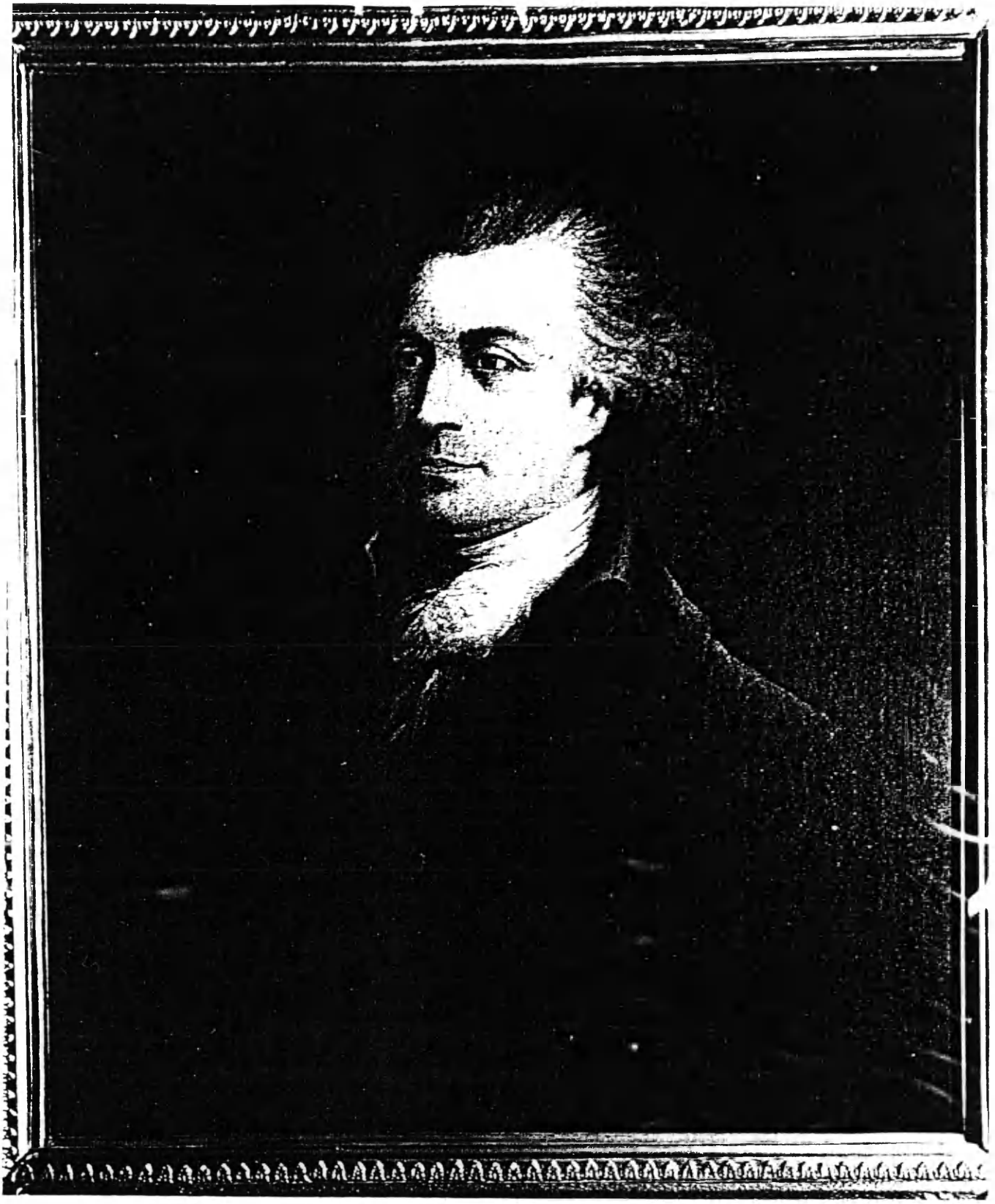


Fig. 24

VITA

Toby Maria Chieffo

Born in Washington, DC, April 5, 1971. Graduated from the Madeira School in Greenway, Virginia in May 1989. B.A. Georgetown University, May 1993, with Dean's List First Honors, elected to Phi Beta Kappa, Alpha Sigma Nu (Jesuit Honor Society), with a concentration in American Studies. Awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Research Grant in 1992.

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